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Enhancing the capacity of public administration to implement the United Nations Millennium Declaration

Mainstreaming poverty reduction strategies within the Millennium development goals: the role of public administration

Report of the Secretariat**

Summary

The nations of the world, under the umbrella of the United Nations, have consistently perceived the current global concerns as major challenges that need to be met head on with the will and resolution of the international community. One of the central challenges addressed by the Millennium development goals, is the abject and dehumanizing poverty in which more than one billion people are currently confined. Many of these challenges, though immense, are not insurmountable. Weak institutional structures and inadequate capacities of the key stakeholders are the fundamental base where these challenges reside. Institutions with major capacity deficits cannot develop strategies and policies commensurate to the task and their power of execution is anaemic. Weak institutions make poor partners, have inadequate links with their constituents, and are unable to make effective use of advice sought. Hence, all the Millennium development goals, but particularly poverty reduction, depend crucially on the effectiveness and efficiency of institutions, especially at the national level. In addition to the overarching requirement of upgrading capacities, the localization of the goals, their partnering with other major initiatives, and their being set high on the development agenda of countries, with commensurate policy-setting and budgetary resources, are key prerequisites to their future progress.

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I. The context

A. The United Nations Millennium Declaration and the Millennium development goals

1. The nations of the world, under the umbrella of the United Nations, have consistently perceived the current global concerns as major challenges that need to be met head on with the will and resolution of the international community. These have been grouped into four major areas of concern[1] for the Organization's work, namely:

(a) The challenge of abject and dehumanizing poverty, in which more than 1 billion people are currently confined;

(b) The challenge of the scourge of war and especially from the violence of civil conflict and the fear of weapons of mass destruction;

(c) The ultimate concern of life on a planet irredeemably spoilt by human activities, and whose resources may no longer provide for human needs;

(d) The immediate concern of a United Nations lacking effective instruments for confronting all three of the above.

2. In 2000, the General Assembly issued one of the most significant set of international commitments through the United Nations Millennium Declaration.[2] In it, Member States committed themselves to a set of Millennium development goals for the first 20 years into the twenty-first century. These goals are the culmination of a series of earlier international commitments, and global summits, including the World Conference on Education for All, United Nations Conferences on the Least Developed Countries, the World Conference on Women and the World Summit for Social Development. What is new about the Millennium development goals is that they have been signed by 189 Member States, with numerical and time-bound objectives.

3. In the final Declaration, the nations at the United Nations Millennium Summit also singled out specific areas that constitute special threats to the social values that need urgent and additional attention. These include:

(a) Human rights, democracy and good governance;

(b) Protecting the vulnerable, namely the children and civilian populations from disproportionate consequences of natural disasters, genocide, armed conflicts and other humanitarian emergencies;

(c) Meeting the special needs of Africa, that is: consolidation of democracy, lasting peace, poverty eradication and sustainable development.

4. In all, there are eight goals, 18 targets and 48 indicators. From the outset, it was stressed that the goals must be nationally led and driven and that these do not displace, but rather, complement, the commitments made earlier.

5. From the few studies undertaken to date, including on the Millennium development goals and Africa, it is already clear that the challenges are immense but not insurmountable. It needs to be stressed that many of these challenges reside in the weak institutional structures and inadequate capacities of the key stakeholders, both Government and civil society, and this is not due purely to resource limitations.

Weak institutions, by definition, are the ones that cannot develop strategies and policies, even when a mandate is given to them, and their powers of execution are either anaemic or lacking. But it goes further than that, for weak institutions do not have strong links with their constituents, clients or stakeholders, are feeble on partnerships and are either not able to make effective use of advice or lack the capacity to respond critically to the advice given. By implication, weak institutions are likely to be a major obstacle in driving, monitoring, partnering or implementing their tasks and responsibilities engendered by the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium development goals process. The strong presumption is that countries with the weakest institutional capacities, particularly on public administration, are also the ones that lag in progress on the development goals. This presumption cannot be supported by any rigorous data from public administration sector reviews, for these are not yet standard exercises and the few that are available are neither comparable nor conclusive.

6. Anecdotal evidence from least developed countries, especially from Africa, and especially related to programmatic support by the United Nations system, time and again points to capacity deficit of institutions as a major constraint in the formulation and execution of programmes and projects. Institutional structures that are weak are not likely to train, or retain, the human resources necessary for the tasks in hand. Finally, weak institutional structures are not very good at partnering, do not respond well to their constituents and are not outwardly focused. It is in this light that institutions and institutional capacities are viewed in the present paper and not in an abstract way devoid of purpose or culture.

B. Review to date

7. Overall, there are problems associated with the scope and universality of the Millennium development goals. It has often been pointed out that some goals, for example, reduction in malaria, may be valuable to some countries, for instance in parts of Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, but not to other countries, including transitional economies. The concept of poverty, that is the internationally set norm of one United States dollar a day, may be valid for least developed countries but not for all Millennium development goal countries. Further, should the goals take into account the distributional impact of the gains within countries as well as the inter-generational impact? These concerns have been expressed both at the national level and at international forums to ensure that the goals retain flexibility and relevance at the country level.[3]

8. First, the goals must be localized, that is, the process must evolve from the international arena to the national processes and priorities. The process itself is of considerable importance, for participation and advocacy is key if the development goals as a process will be understood and shared by national Governments and civil society. The localization of the goals is not purely a matter of setting national targets and national priorities. Their institutional localization is of equal, if not greater, importance. Weak administrative entities are hardly the vehicle to propel and implement the process. Line ministries, including those dealing with the social sectors, are invariably of a lower rank and power than central macroeconomic ministries, including Finance, Planning and the Central Bank. In Sri Lanka, for example, the Ministry of Social Services, which is the focal point for monitoring social development, has neither the professional capacity nor the resources to

undertake its task efficiently and effectively. This is because social sectors have always received low priority, owing to the aggressive reforms aimed at reducing the governmental machinery, and the shortage of public resources which gives priority to the key economic agencies of finance and the Central Bank.

9. Second, the interpretation of the Millennium development goals has a broader scope than any comparable initiative, including poverty reduction strategy papers. In this light, the understanding and instruments used at present, including the poverty reduction strategy paper and the national budget, to tackle key issues, including poverty, are not adequate for the Millennium development goal task.

10. Third, on their own, the goals are very low in the development agenda of individual countries, unless they partner other ongoing initiatives, including national human development reports and especially the poverty reduction strategy papers. However, the latter process is both too narrow and short term, a three-year revolving programme, to accommodate the goals. This collaboration is important for practical as well as conceptual purposes. At the practical level, given the pre-eminence of the poverty reduction strategy papers and the limited capacities of national administrations, the goals have little likelihood of being seriously implemented unless they provide a framework for more targeted and adequately resourced initiatives. At the conceptual level, the purpose is to demonstrate that a key Millennium development goal, such as poverty reduction, is culturally and institutionally bound, and in addition to raising incomes, is associated with a host of other parallel concerns. Further, the manner of approaching these problems is not by imposing conditionalities but by negotiation, collaboration and participation.

11. Fourth, the capacities of countries, and especially the least developed countries, are not sufficiently strong to deal with the complexities and implications engendered by the development goals, even when these are raised as national priorities and on the policy menu of individual countries. In this respect, it has been noted that countries have so many competing demands on their poorly paid and understaffed public servants that the goals do not come as a welcome boon but rather as an additional call on their scarce and ill prepared staff.

12. Fifth, the database for analysis and policy formation at the national level is too weak to enable dealing effectively with the Millennium development goals in the national policy framework. The data often deals with national averages, with little attention to gender, geographic region, or occupational status. It is imperative to know who is being lifted out of poverty even where the national averages show that progress has been made. The response rate by gender, socio-economic status and occupational profile is of importance where priorities are set, or where resources need to be conserved.

C. Demands on public administration

13. What are the demands imposed by the tasks related to following up and implementing the Millennium development goals on the institutional capacities of public administration? It has been pointed out that Governments of developing countries have overwhelming responsibilities and chronic resource constraints, not only in terms of the national political and management responsibilities, but also in terms of responsibilities vis-à-vis the international community. As clearly stated in paragraph 2 of the Millennium Declaration, heads of States recognize that, "in

addition to our separate responsibilities to our individual societies, we have a collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level. As leaders we have a duty therefore to all the world's people, especially the most vulnerable and, in particular, the children of the world, to whom the future belongs".

14. These additional responsibilities, directly related to the implementation of the goals, as written in the Declaration, are not new. Since the signature of the Charter of the United Nations, Member States have been bound by the oversight and rules of the international community, the supranational responsibilities. Globalization has brought in new complexities and responsibilities with which Governments have been increasingly forced to march along, with the standards and pace imposed by this phenomenon. In the latest phase of market-led restructuring, in the early to mid-1990s, public sector reforms were implemented across the board as part of the efforts to reduce the size of the State and privatize much of the parastatal sector, without however raising or improving the incentive structure. The reforms also paved the way for the adoption and consolidation of the market economy as the dominant paradigm for the production and distribution of goods and better windows of opportunities for the bright job seekers. The aftermath of this exercise has been a reduced public administration and, in many countries, the non-intended effect of reduced intellectual capacity. Owing to the aggressive market orientation and so-called decentralization, central agencies, which in the past owned and provided funding to the social development activities, especially at the subregional levels, lost required financial resources and political legitimacy. For example, in China, the central agencies often complain that increasing privatization of health facilities seemed to have not only weakened the supply of health services (especially at the rural level) but also, many subnational agencies which in the past regularly supplied health data to the central agency seemed to have lost the motivation to do so. The actions needed at the country level to localize the Millennium development goals, that is, set them in the national context, can be linked to the development goals and the targets themselves, and the following are based on the United Nations Millennium Declaration and the report of the Secretary-General on a road map towards its implementation (A/56/326).[4]

15. As stated in the road map, it is crucial that the Millennium development goals become national goals and serve to increase the coherence and consistency of national policies and programmes. National ownership of the goals is key to success. While 189 Member States of the United Nations have signed the Millennium Declaration, not all have yet adjusted their national strategies and plans to reflect fully their commitment.[5]

16. In essence, mainstreaming the goal of poverty within the Millennium development goals will require the public administration to be: (a) more engaging and receptive; (b) more skilled and visionary; (c) more open and transparent; (d) more facilitating and guiding; and (e) more just.

17. The central agencies of the Government should be supportive by empowering the line or operational ministries to achieve specific targets, with special impetus. These agencies should develop consensus on a vision, to formulate a long-term strategy in the identified sectors and to coordinate the implementation of that strategy administration-wide. A shift in the mindset of the central clusters' staff

from one of command-and-control to service-orientation, in dealing with line ministries' staff, is also needed.

18. The strategies for moving forward in halving, by the year 2015, the proportion of the world's population whose income is less than one dollar a day and the proportion of people who suffer from hunger, include (a) ensuring support for country-led economic and social initiatives that focus on poverty reduction; (b) strengthening capabilities to provide basic social services; and (c) assisting capacity-building for poverty assessment, monitoring and planning (A/56/326, para. 86).

19. Coordination among public sector institutions is essential in achieving the targets. It is essential to introducing and maintaining effective inter-agency and inter-ministerial cooperation. The central agencies also need a robust common information management system for tracking the overall progress of policy and programme implementation, evaluating the performance of line ministries, providing input into political decision-making and managing accountability of utilized resources.

20. The decentralization process must be made compatible with the Millennium development goals, including strategies not only for adequately resourcing local governments and entities, but also for holding local public institutions accountable for programme operations and outcomes that they must achieve within the framework of the national development strategy. A strong centre, with a relevant enabling environment, is also an essential prerequisite for meaningful and effective decentralization The decentralization process must also include modalities that engage the public administration with the community in a more robust manner.

21. In order for the world to achieve by 2020 a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers, actions required, supported by the international community, include, among others, (a) the provision of basic social services, such as safe water and sanitation, to the urban poor; (b) ensuring the development of integrated and participatory approaches to urban environmental planning and management; and (c) ensuring good urban governance and planning by forging public-private partnerships (A/56/326, para. 121).

22. As regards the demands on African countries, the Millennium development goals in general are directed at some key governance areas that deserve particular attention, including: (a) strengthening strategic planning, central guidance and coordination among governance institutions; (b) developing conflict-management institutions; (c) reinforcing local government; (d) ensuring the adherence to the rule of law by strengthening the legislative process and the judiciary and by empowering civil society; and (e) developing leadership skills for envisioning, strategizing and guiding Africa's development within the global arena.

23. Strategically, the best option seems to be to link the goals to both the follow-up of the poverty reduction strategy paper, and the preparation of the national human development report. In the former case, namely the poverty reduction strategy paper, because, one of its most important targets, poverty reduction, is a critical component of the Millennium development goals and, in the latter, because of its advantages in disseminating ideas and information, creating awareness and constituency around critical issues.

24. The international community, that is to say, the United Nations system, must support the integration of the Millennium development goals with the other major initiatives, such as the poverty reduction strategy paper, in particular, by taking into account the differences between these instruments. The poverty reduction strategy paper, on the one hand, is a short and medium-term planning tool linked to financial targets and the budget, while the Millennium development goals respond to long-term needs linked to other critical social and environmental vectors. The Millennium requirements cannot be separated and treated individually. However, they do have a commonality of purpose and a main thrust, which the present paper addresses, namely, how these requirements, individually and as a whole, attack poverty and empower national Governments and civil society, including the private sector, to tackle them.

II. Challenges

A. Taking stock

25. At the outset, it may be worthwhile to recall what is in place, the interim progress made and what is seen as outstanding. This will lead to a discussion of the question of more specific challenges and the role of public administration in this process. In principle, the Millennium development goals are managed and guided by the United Nations Development Group, which is chaired by the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and is charged with providing a framework for greater coherence and cooperation in United Nations development operations. United Nations Development Group members provide policy and programme support to more than 150 countries around the world in such areas as poverty, sustainable development, good governance, human rights, child welfare, population and reproductive health, women's rights, food security, human settlements and drug control. Jointly the member agencies and programmes mobilize and deploy more than US$ 5 billion annually in resources for development. The Group is led by an Executive Committee comprising the heads of UNDP, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Food Programme (WFP). In addition to the Executive Committee members, the Group includes other entities, such as the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the United Nations Children's Fund, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization.

26. Under the United Nations Development Group there are three main elements that drive the strategy for the Millennium development goals:

(a) The Millennium Project analyses policy options and is charged with developing a plan for implementing and achieving the Millennium development goals. It is composed of 10 task forces related to the goals and is directed by Professor Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University;

(b) The Millennium Campaign mobilizes political support for the United Nations Millennium Declaration in both developed and developing countries and is led by Evelyn Herfkens;

(c) Operational country-level activities are coordinated across agencies through UNDP, and the United Nations resident coordinators and help individual countries to implement policies necessary for achieving the Millennium development goals.

27. At the global level, the monitoring of progress for the goals is entrusted to the Statistical Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and an annual report is prepared for the Secretary-General. The expectation is that, by the end of 2004, every country will have a Millennium development goal report completed, in time for the five-year comprehensive review to be delivered by the Secretary-General. As at September, 2002, 12 countries had prepared a Millennium development goal report, and 40 others were in the process of doing so.[6]

28. In terms of aggregate budgeting, cost estimates by the World Bank, UNICEF and the World Health Organization suggest that meeting most of the Millennium development goals by 2015, including halving extreme poverty, will require an additional US$ 50 billion per year in development assistance. Though this implies doubling current aid levels, it represents around one fifth of 1 per cent of income in donor countries. Major initiatives subsequent to the International Conference on Financing for Development, held in Monterrey, Mexico in 2002, include commitments by the United States of America, of an additional US$ 5 billion, and by the European Union of US$ 7 billion.

29. Official development assistance and debt relief will be indispensable, especially for the least developed countries on the road map to development and fulfilling their Millennium development goal commitments. Total official development assistance at present is about 0.23 per cent, or one third of the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of the combined gross national income of developed countries. The shortfall amounts to about US$ 125 billion per year — or more than twice the additional assistance said to be needed to ensure that the Millennium development goals are secured. It is generally acknowledged that resources alone are unlikely to be sufficient to ensure that poor countries attain the goals, and that capacity-building in all its facets, including institutional, human resources, governance and bridging the digital divide, is a prerequisite for their achievement.[7] Given the likelihood that official development assistance will not increase to the required levels in the immediate future, then the challenge of capacity-building is even more pressing. Although debt relief and trade are other essential adjuncts in support of the Millennium development goals, progress with these, including the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, and the World Trade Organization meeting held in Doha in 2002, have not been sufficient to compensate for the other deficits, both institutional and resource-wise. A study of budgetary spending in some 30 developing countries revealed that two thirds of them spend more on debt servicing than on basic social services. In sub-Saharan Africa, Governments spend about twice the amount of money to comply with their financial commitments vis-à-vis external creditors than to comply with their social obligations vis-à-vis the people.[8] The unevenness of progress in securing Millennium development goals to date is well documented, both overall and for sub-Saharan Africa in particular, which provides an additional challenge and concern expressed by the international community and the national Governments.[9]

B. The main challenges

30. The main challenges facing the Millennium development goals are multifaceted, that is, they are economic, social, political and institutional, and are at different levels, namely, national, regional and global. Public administration, and more broadly, governance, constitute in part, the institutions and institutional processes that connect the different facets of the challenge and provides a tangible expression as to how far the commitments go. Markets and institutions are interlinked and, even where markets are said to operate efficiently, an institutional framework is still needed, not only to provide an enabling environment and the ground rules for engagement, but also to bring to the development agenda those concerns, in this case the Millennium development goals, that otherwise the market may miss. In this regard, the observation attributed to Keynes, that the role of the State is not simply to do what the market does, or to compete with the market over the same space, but to do what the market cannot do, including getting a consensus for a social agenda, is still valid. In this, partnerships and partnering, among State, civil society and the private sector, on the one hand, and coordination of different initiatives, including the Millennium development goals, poverty reduction strategy papers, the United Nations Development Assistance Framework and national human development reports, on the other, is by far the most pronounced challenge for the United Nations system.

31. Beginning at the national level, it is critical to support countries to "localize" the Millennium development goals and to formulate the necessary documentation, including the mandated national reports, by late 2004. As seen earlier, the task of formulating goals, has already begun, but the majority of developing countries, especially the least developed countries and in sub-Saharan Africa, have either not done so, or the output to date can be improved. The improvements required are at three levels, as set out below:

(a) First, the adaptation of the international commitments, namely the Millennium development goals, at the national level, and in a manner that reflects their national priorities. Close to this is the development of statistical capacities for policy advice and monitoring of the goals and of the indicators that map their progress. At the country level, the Millennium development goals are coordinated by the United Nations Development Assistance Framework process, on behalf of the United Nations system, and the offices of UNDP and the United Nations resident coordinators are charged with animating the process, advocacy and ensuring that the participation of the relevant United Nations agencies and programmes, is secured. The statistical base for least developed countries, especially in Africa, is very weak for the purposes of formulating and monitoring the goals, and support from the relevant agencies is not yet systematized;

(b) Second, the formulation of a strategy that ensures that the Millennium development goals serve as the driving process of development, and that this is reflected both in the administration and in the resource mobilization and allocation of public expenditure. This is by far the most complex task for, on the one hand, it presupposes a long-term development vision, which was abandoned under the market-led reforms of the 1980s and, on the other, of ensuring that the institutional framework, including the macroeconomic agencies of finance, planning and the central bank, places the Millennium development goals high on their list of priorities and activities;

(c) Third, the partnering of the goals with other ongoing initiatives, such as the poverty reduction strategy paper, the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries and the national human development reports, to ensure that synergies are created and that the Millennium development goals govern the goals, targets and expenditure thrust, of the other initiatives. The other side of the coin, or of partnering, is among the State, civil society and the private sector, not only for purposes of participation, and legitimacy, but because without the support of civil society and the private sector, the likelihood of embedding the goals in the development culture of the country is lessened.

32. The case of Burkina Faso, a very poor country, even by the standards of developing countries, is presented in the following box as an example of how a country, with United Nations system support aims to bridge the gap of the various initiatives and towards the fulfilment of the Millennium development goals. Above all, by pursuing aggressively the modality of participatory approach in poverty analysis and policy options demonstrated public administration's keen commitment to be engaging. This is a good example of value shift in public administration.

Burkina Faso — Towards a synthesis of development initiatives

Burkina Faso is among the countries that are currently expected to face a major challenge in achieving the Millennium development goals. Constraints include a low annual per capita income, around US$ 220, and a human development index rank of 169 out of 173 countries, among the lowest in the world. Over 60 per cent of the population lives below the US$ 1 poverty line, net primary enrolment is estimated at 34 per cent and the ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary education stands at 66.5 per cent. Under 5 and infant mortality rates are at 205 and 105 per 1,000 live births, respectively.

In 2001 the Government invited the United Nations system, including UNDP and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, to formulate a project intended to build capacities in the areas of socio-economic governance. Within the overall goal of capacity-building, the project pursues the following objectives: develop a poverty monitoring and analysis system at the national level; develop a poverty monitoring and analysis system at the regional level; prepare a national long-term perspective study, in order to better tackle broader issues that take into account the Millennium development goals; and assist selected ministries involved in the process to build their own capacities.

In addition to UNDP and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, most of the activities are developed in collaboration with other development partners, including the World Bank, the French Cooperation Agency, the African Development Bank and UNICEF.

The main challenges for the coming years and the progress expected are in the following directions: better use of the poverty reduction strategy paper in allocating budgetary resources to the benefit of the poor; an enhanced participatory process by building capacity for stakeholders; support of the decentralization process and give greater responsibility to the local institutions; deepening of the policy dialogue over the poverty reduction strategy paper and the Millennium development goals and improving the monitoring system and dissemination of information among stakeholders.

Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs project BKF/00/01.

33. A lesson to be drawn from the example of Burkina Faso is that challenges but also opportunities are considerable, provided the United Nations system acts in unison, alongside national Governments and the rest of the international partners. Moreover, the poverty of a country is not the real obstacle, but rather, the challenge and a platform for the various stakeholders to ensure that their relative competencies and resources are applied in a manner that befits the requirements, both material and human, of the Millennium development goals.

III. Way forward

A. The road map: international implications

34. The road map (A/56/326) provides an outline of the potential strategies for action that are designed to meet the goals and commitments made by the 147 Heads of State and Government and 189 Member States in total, who adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration. It comprehensively deals with every one of the goals and commitments contained in the Declaration, suggests paths to follow and shares information on "best practices". The sections of the road map deal, in sequence, with

(a) Peace, security and disarmament, where the report outlines measures that will help to promote human security;

(b) Development and poverty eradication: the Millennium development goals, which focuses on sustainable development through poverty eradication, emphasizing the importance of halving the number of people currently living on one dollar a day or less;

(c) Protecting our common environment, which describes the environmental constraints and challenges;

(d) Human rights, democracy and good governance which, inter alia, reaffirms the fundamental human rights, including democratic institutions, empowerment of citizens and genuine political participation;

(e) Protecting the vulnerable, which focuses on those groups, in particular women and children, that are forced into situations of displacement and abuse because of complex humanitarian situations;

(f) Meeting the special needs of Africa, which addresses the challenges posed by extreme poverty, devastating debt burdens, disease, conflict and wavering international interests;

(g) Strengthening the United Nations, which makes the case that renewing the capacity of the Organization to provide space for continuous dialogue and a catalyst for effective action, calling for renewed coordination among its principal organs and enhanced partnerships with other multilateral organizations and civil society.

35. The report concludes with a section entitled "the road ahead", in which it is noted that there will be annual reports and every five years, a comprehensive report on progress made in reaching these goals. The road map may appear daunting but it is consonant with the lofty ideals and objectives contained in the Millennium Declaration. In addition it provides an idea for the challenge ahead for public administration, in the broad sense, if it going to play a key role in the realization of the Millennium development goals. There are, however, a number of developments, and direct implications for public administration that are worth considering.

36. It may be recalled, and as stressed in the road map, that the Millennium development goals are the culmination and distillation of a number of global conferences of the 1990s and from a body of international norms and laws that have been codified over the past half century. In this sense, all the successes and failures experienced in meeting commitments for previous conferences are inherited by the Millennium development goals. This wider perspective must be kept in mind when discussing the particular challenges that face public administration and, more generally, governance, set out below.

37. At the international level, progress with the Millennium development goals will depend not only on the various initiatives already being taken by the United Nations system, including the internal ones managed by the United Nations Development Group, but also those put in place with other partners. The International Conference on Financing for Development and the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2002, not only reaffirmed the United Nations Millennium Declaration and the Millennium development goals, but refined them further and acted as a catalyst in mobilizing resources.

B. The road map: national implications

38. In a modest, but incisive way, the 2002 session of United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration brought out a series of reports on building capacities for the Millennium development goals that are catalysing the process at both the national and international levels.[10] Hence, there are a number of initiatives in place, some more targeted than others, where these fit well within the Millennium development goal road map and where coordination can be tightened.

39. A major challenge is how to set the Millennium development goals high in the national strategy domain. Another, and simpler, description of this is how to "localize" the goals. One part of this task is simply to adapt the internationally set Millennium development goals to national requirements and in the national context of priorities. For example, for sub-Saharan Africa, the eradication of Malaria is

extremely important, and the setting of the poverty line to one dollar per day readily acceptable. For other countries, for example, those with economies in transition, neither the malaria Millennium development goal nor the definition of extreme poverty at one dollar or less per day, are very relevant. Hence, the goals must be informed and refined at the national level and within the economic and development parameters of each country. The other related requirement is the formulation of a development vision, or strategy, for the goals that it is "home grown" and set in a milieu that is nationally bred and led. This is an even more engaging challenge than the adaptation of the Millennium development goals, objectives and indicators, in that it implies the design of a development strategy around the goals and the partnering of this strategy with other major initiatives. The way forward suggested is to broaden the existing development vision of countries in a manner that the Millennium development goals can provide its outer layer. Within this the other nationally based initiatives, including the poverty reduction strategy papers, the national human development reports and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, can fit perfectly well for these will cover a particular subspace of the goals. For example, in comparison to the poverty reduction strategy papers, the Millennium development goals are of a longer duration, as the former are typically on a three-year programming cycle, and the goals treat poverty alongside other objectives. Yet, the partnership with poverty reduction strategy papers is vital both because of resource considerations (they are funded) and because they occupy an institutional seat, including finance and planning ministries, that is of immense importance to the Millennium development goals.

40. This working together with other major initiatives is absolutely necessary, especially for those countries, such as many in sub-Saharan Africa, where institutional and human resource capacities are very weak. The rationale for this partnering is that national administrations are not able to cover too many initiatives separately and simultaneously. Were there to be a contest, or destructive rivalry, between the poverty reduction strategy papers and the Millennium development goals, the latter would likely come out as the loser, not only because of budget considerations, but also because the agencies that make the key decisions, including finance, planning and central banks, are already tied to the poverty reduction strategy papers. Hence, both conceptually, the vision element for Millennium development goals, and to avoid undue competition among major initiatives for national attention and resources, poverty reduction strategy papers and Millennium development goals need to march under the same banner. The partnering of Millennium development goals with other national (e.g. poverty reduction strategy papers or national human development reports) or regional initiatives, requires significant analytical capacity within the public sector to enable envisioning of these linkages.

41. The national human development reports, for example, are an excellent vehicle to play an advocacy and monitoring role for Millennium development goals, or particular concerns associated with them. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs is currently cooperating (see the box below) on formulating a project for sub-Saharan Africa to strengthen national human development reports in three directions. First, in terms of process, second in terms of content and standards and third, in terms of outreach and dissemination. The other strength of national human development reports in support of Millennium development goals is that these have a strong partnering with civil society and bring to the fore development issues and

concerns that the Government entities may miss, or neglect. In terms of synergies and the saving of costs, the human resources mobilized for formulating the national human development reports are the most likely to take also cognizance of the Millennium development goals and the relevance of these objectives to the programme country. Thus, not only are the reports a natural vehicle for development goal advocacy, but the scarce resources usually allocated to contribute to the one, namely, the national human development reports, from the office of the United Nations resident coordinator, or UNDP Resident Representative, are also likely the ones dealing with the orchestration and advocacy of the other, that is, the Millennium development goals.

National human development reports as tools for mainstreaming Millennium development goals

The Department of Economic and Social Affairs, working jointly with UNDP has developed a project in support of the national human development reports in sub-Saharan Africa. It may be recalled that, since the publication of the first report in Bangladesh in 1992, they have grown in number, covering some 135 countries and over 400 reports, and in scope to raise public awareness and stimulate action on human development concerns. Increasingly, the reports are seen as potentially significant avenues for advocacy and for support to the realization of the objectives set by the Millennium development goals. In India for example, the subnational human development reports are becoming a very effective tool for mainstreaming social concerns into the planning and the budgeting process. Similar efforts are also being made by national Governments with UNDP support in several countries in Africa.

Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

C. Conclusions and recommendations

42. **A central challenge is the repositioning of the machinery of the State in line with Millennium development goal requirements. This of course is the core of the various recent reports by the Group of Experts of Public Administration, 2002, noted above.[11] What does this imply? First, it implies overcoming the paradox inherited from the structural adjustment reforms of the 1980s and 1990s of a weak and reduced State at a time when one expects to have a highly performing administration even for purposes of poverty reduction strategy papers alone. Second, it implies a State that reaches out for civil society and private sector involvement as a means of development alliances for specific Millennium development goals. Third, the planning capacity, and with it, the statistical and policy analysis services of national administrations of least developed countries are weak. This was part of the collateral damage of the market-driven reforms of containing the power of the State and the planning machinery.**

43. **A final imperative is the coordination of the various entities of public administration responsible for implementation of the Millennium development goals. These include both the rights-based and the development management-based institutions. The key challenge for the public administration is how to establish linkage between these two, for the former will not be achieved if the rights-based concerns are not operationalized through the latter. It is therefore imperative for the public administration to develop tools, techniques and indeed the capacities to reflect the rights concerned through the planning, budgeting and implementation processes of the development management frameworks.**

44. **Capacity-building of the public administration to advance Millennium development goal mainstreaming is indeed an important element of the development agenda. In the light of the above, normative activities, research and technical cooperation efforts should support developing countries to upgrade capacities, including institutions, human resources and policy advice, focusing on Millennium development goal concerns. The machinery for the global monitoring of Millennium development goals is in place within the Statistical Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and the first reports have already been released.[12] Initiatives for upgrading capacities for statistical and monitoring purposes are being built through partnerships by the United Nations system and national institutions. One such example is the current project formulated by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and UNDP to upgrade the capacities for statistical support in sub-Saharan Africa. Beyond these, web sites for dissemination of information and for exchange of experiences are created by different entities and for different purposes.[13] The matter of coordination does not stop there, however, for beyond this there is the perennial challenge of political will committing countries to the Millennium development goals, both as a development vision and as numerical goals and objectives, and to formulating the relevant strategies for their implementation. To this end, it is worth concluding from the road map that: "What is needed, therefore, is not more technical or feasibility studies. Rather, States need to demonstrate the political will to carry out commitments already given and to implement strategies already worked out" (A/56/326, para. 7).**

45. **One may argue that it is early yet, in that we are only in the third year of the new Millennium and the Millennium development goals, including the road map, is for the long haul — tentatively set to 2015. However, it is not early if one considers that the base year for the Millennium development goals is not 2000, but rather 1990, and that in the intervening period, to date, progress is mixed with considerable slippage outside the two most populous countries, China and India, and especially critical in the least developed countries, including Africa. If such progress is to be secured more widely and fairly, the role of public administration as demonstrated above both directly, in terms of institutions, role, functions and processes, and indirectly, in terms of helping to develop a strategic vision around Millennium development goals, or to coordinate the various initiatives, including poverty reduction strategy papers and national human development reports, is indispensable.**

Notes

[1] See the report of the Secretary-General entitled "We the peoples: the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century" (A/54/2000).

[2] See General Assembly resolution 55/2.

[3] On the complexities of monitoring poverty for the Millennium development goals, see the paper by Professor Angus Deaton entitled "Data for Monitoring the Poverty MDG", January 2003, delivered at United Nations Headquarters, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, on 6 February 2003.

[4] Unless otherwise indicated, the areas have been identified in the report before the Committee of Experts on Public Administration at its first session in July 2002, entitled "The critical role of public administration and good governance in implementing the United Nations Millennium Declaration: institutional capacity development" (E/C.16/2002/4).

[5] United Nations Development Group, "The United Nations and the MDGs — a core strategy", 2002.

[6] The 12 countries that had completed Millennium development goal reports as at September 2002 are: Albania, Bolivia, Cambodia, Cameroon, Chad, Madagascar, Mauritius, Nepal, Poland, Senegal, the United Republic of Tanzania and Viet Nam. Among the 40 countries in the process of completing reports, only four, namely, the Central African Republic, Somalia, South Africa and the Sudan, were reported from sub-Saharan Africa.

[7] In a review of progress with the Millennium development goals, entitled "Are the MDGs Feasible" (UNDP, June 2002), the author of the paper, Jan Vandemoortele, concludes that reaching the Millennium development goals will not only require extra spending, but also better spending. Money alone will not solve the problem; human and institutional capacities need improvement too. However, the argument that existing resources must be used more efficiently first before investing extra money in basic social services misses the point that insufficiencies often create inefficiencies.

[8] Cited by Vandemoortele, ibid.

[9] On the global monitoring of the Millennium development goals, see the report of the Secretary-General on implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration (A/57/270), and for Africa in particular, see the report entitled "Development goals in Africa: promises and progress", prepared by UNDP and UNICEF in June, 2002. The overall message of the latter report, which reinforces the Secretary-General's report, is that, despite sporadic progress, sub-Saharan Africa is lagging far behind in its efforts to reach the commitments of the Millennium development goals.

[10] For an overall view, see in particular, the report of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration on the first session, 22 to 26 July 2002, *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Supplement No. 24* (E/2002/84). Specific reports issued include: the critical role of public administration and good governance in implementing the United Nations Millennium Declaration: institutional capacity development (E/C.16/2002/4); the critical role of public administration and good governance in implementing the United Nations Millennium Declaration: human resources development (E/C.16/2002/3); report of the Secretariat on the financing capacity of the public sector to implement the United Nations Millennium Declaration (E/C.16/2002/6); report of the Secretariat on the capacity of the public sector to support the creation and application of knowledge, innovation and technology for development (E/C.16/2002/5); report of the Secretariat on the critical role of public administration and good governance in implementing the United Nations Millennium Declaration: e-government, known applications and enabling environment (E/C.16/2002/7).

[11] Documents dealing with capacity-building and the Millennium development goals are E/C.16/2002/2; E/C.16/2002/3, E/C.16/2002/4, E/C.16/2002/5, E/C.16/2002/6 and E/C.16/2002/7.

[12] In particular, see the report of the Secretary-General on implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration (A/57/270).

[13] For example, MDG Net is a dedicated service organized by UNDP where practitioners share information and exchange experiences on Millennium development goals, while the site www.UNPAN.org is a network organized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs that provides most of the documentation on Millennium development goals that has emanated from the Group of Experts on Public Administration.